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JERRY C. AUSBAND / *Editorial page editor*

A smoking issue

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The Environmental Protection Agency, in its wisdom, has decreed that "second-hand smoke" from tobacco products has become a significant health hazard.

OK. I'll accept that, even if it is statistically derived.

Every life of an independently sustained human being is well worth saving. Every life is precious.

But in the same sense that the EPA estimates that 3,000 lives a year could be saved in the United States if there were no second-hand smoke, let me statistically note a few things.

There are, by the 1990 Census, 248.7 million Americans in this nation. Those 3,000 who the EPA says will die this year from second-hand smoke represent 1/1000 of a percent of the total population. They are human beings who, the EPA statistically says, will die singularly from being exposed to secondary smoke. No other causes accepted.

There are, by the 1990 Census, 3,486,703 South Carolinians. They represent about 1.4 percent of the national population. It seems reasonable, then, to assume that 1.4 percent of those 3,000 second-hand smoking deaths would occur in South Carolina. Other factors may change the statistical comparison slightly.

If the comparison is at least somewhat correct, then South Carolina would expect 42 second-hand smoking deaths per year. That is a large number for a small state, and certainly no death can be excused.

There are, by the 1990 Census, 144,053 Horryites in South Carolina, about 4 percent of the state's population.

It can be assumed, then, that 4 percent of the second-hand smoke deaths in this state would be caused in Horry County.

That amounts, with rounding to the nearest whole, to two people.

It could be statistically important that Horry County attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, but they should all be covered, in effect, by the statistics that affect their home states.

I do not deprecate the lives of people in Horry County.

In fact, I think Horry County's bars and restaurants, in particular, ought to think, if they haven't already, about deciding how to separate smokers from non-smokers. Some restaurants try to do that already, but frankly, I'm not quite convinced that a non-partitioned, limply exhausted division of the house will do.

Partitions and high-powered exhaust systems will be necessary, provided the bar or restaurant actually determines it wants to serve both smokers and non-smokers. Given the testiness of health groups and the proclivity of the General Assembly, they may not get that opportunity unless they proceed immediately to segregate smokers and non-smokers.

That will take money. A smokers' bar and a non-smokers' bar. Separate bartenders, of course. A smokers' eating place and a non-smokers' eating place. A smokers' waiting room and a non-smokers' waiting room.

Actually, there would be fewer deaths if no one smoked, according to the statistical associations that health care providers have made into diagnoses. According to national findings, 435,000 Americans die directly and solely from smoking themselves to death each year. That means, using the same percentages as on second-hand smoke, that 6,090 South Carolinians died only from smoking. Of that number, 244 Horryites die.

So it seems reasonable to me that if some restaurants and bars should decide to serve smokers only, they could reasonably expect to lose 244 customers a year.

I'm not making light of death from cancer. It's horrible. My dad died from it. But when the EPA and the pressure groups start talking, talk statistics with them.

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/rqbn0004